

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PREVENTION SERVICES

In February 2004, the DSS Office of Early Childhood became part of the Children's Division. In September, 2004, the Children's Division reorganized creating an Early Childhood and Prevention Services Section (ECPSS). The primary goal of the ECPSS is to intensify early care and education efforts for children ages 0-5 with the intent that the ECPSS serve as a vehicle for primary prevention services within the agency. The ECPSS focuses not only on child care services, but works intensively in the areas of parent and provider education. Giving parents and providers information on child development, appropriate care and coping skills reduces frustration, anger and isolation thereby preventing potential abuse situations. The ECPSS also provides training to raise awareness and to increase skills in identifying potential abuse/neglect situations so that intervention can occur. The creation of the ECPSS allows the Children's Division to begin addressing prevention in a meaningful, strategic way by utilizing early childhood programs as a vehicle for reaching large numbers of families with very young children with prevention efforts. It also supports school readiness by assisting both parents and caregivers in laying a strong foundation for future learning which in turn assists in leveling the playing field for the most at risk children.

This ECPSS oversees the administration of 1) the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) which provides funding for child care subsidies and quality improvement initiatives; and 2) the state Early Childhood Development Education and Care Fund (ECDECF) which was created by setting aside a portion of gaming funds, specifically the entrance fees to riverboat casinos to be jointly administered by DSS and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

1) Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)

The CCDF is a federal program created to assist low-income and at risk families who are working or attending school or job training programs, and families needing care as part of their child welfare case plan, with the cost of child care. Recent federal requirements have added language to include the incorporation of school readiness, early learning, and child development strategies into programs funded by CCDF. In addition, what is often perceived as neglect is often simply an artifact of poverty. Quality, affordable, accessible child care prevents children being left alone or in unsafe situations. By federal statute, a minimum of four percent (4%) of CCDF funds must be used to enhance the quality of child care programs that receive subsidies through this program.

In Missouri, while the majority of the CCDF provides state child care subsidies for families, including before and after school services in the Kansas City and St.

Louis metropolitan areas in partnership with the LINC and ARCHS Community Partnerships, the quality set-aside funds:

- The Missouri Child Care Resource and Referral Network (MOCCRRN) which provides child care referral services for families and serves as a primary training resource for child care providers.
- The OPEN (Opportunities in a Professional Education Network) initiative which is the state early childhood professional development system and includes a trainer registry, statewide training calendar, and leadership on mentoring and articulation.
- The Missouri Educare program which provides both on and off-site training and technical assistance opportunities for state subsidized child care providers to enhance their caregiving skills.

2) Early Childhood Development Education and Care Fund (ECDECF)

In 1998, a portion of riverboat casino entrance fees were set aside in statute to create the ECDECF. The goals of the ECDECF are:

- To improve access for low-income families to quality early childhood programs, which promote brain development.
- To support low-income families in providing quality educational experiences for their children both at home and in the out of home arrangement when parents must work.
- To improve the quality and availability of childcare in Missouri

DSS based the creation of programs funded under the ECDECF on statute language and the following facts:

- 25% of all Missouri children enter school unprepared to be successful based on the Missouri School Entry Assessment Project.
- Poverty is the number one risk factor for school failure.
- Children whose families are served by DSS are at high risk for entering school unprepared to succeed.
- Gaps present at school entry jeopardize children's opportunity to succeed and are difficult to overcome.
- Lack of child development knowledge and inappropriate age level expectations are leading causes of child abuse and neglect.

The ECDECF Funds:

- **Early Head Start** – Provides state funding for children, ages birth to three years, with family incomes under 100% of the federal poverty level, to receive Early Head Start services via partnerships with existing community based child care partners. Resources are provided for education and training for the child care providers serving these families and the actual services to families

include child care, parent education, substance abuse counseling, self sufficiency, health and mental health services for both the children and their families. Early Head Start utilizes a two-generational approach that has proven successful in working with low income families and families with multiple risk factors

- **Start Up and Expansion Grants** – Lack of availability of childcare for infants and toddlers continues to be an issue in Missouri. This set aside funds grants to childcare providers to create additional quality capacity for children ages 0-3 in the state for currently underserved areas.
- **Accreditation Facilitation Grants and Accreditation Subsidy Enhancement** – Accreditation is an indicator of program quality and program quality is directly correlated with child outcomes. Accreditation, however, is an intensive process, which requires significant investment on the part of the provider and usually takes at least three years from the time the process is initiated. This set aside provides technical assistance with the accreditation process and rate enhancements to accredited providers.
- **Stay At Home Parent Program** – This is a certificate program to assist families under 185% of poverty with information, tools and methods that will allow parents to promote the healthy development of their children. Programs are designed to meet local needs and administered through grants to community-based organizations. Children are developmentally assessed over the course of their participation. Certificates are provided to families in collaboration with local retailers for developmentally appropriate books, toys and materials. Services are provided by the contractor to assist the family in the effective use of resource materials. Communities have done an excellent job of wrapping these services around other available services in order to avoid duplication and maximize the investment. Some communities have been quite successful in using the certificates to create incentives for hard to reach families to participate in pre-existing parent education programs. Referrals are made for additional services to ensure the child's healthy development.